



## LOS ANGELES COUNTY COMMISSION FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

*Celebrating 30 Years of Advocacy & Achievement*

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July 7, 2014

Marvin J. Southard, D.S.W., Director  
County of Los Angeles  
Department of Mental Health  
550 South Vermont Blvd.  
Los Angeles, CA 90020

Dear Dr. Southard:

RE: Mental Health Services Act (MHSA) Innovation Grant - Consideration of Perinatal and Postpartum Treatment Services

The Commission for Children and Families (Commission) has worked diligently to improve the health and well-being of infants, children, adolescents and their parents who are part of the child welfare system. In addition, we focus on those families at-risk of becoming part of this system. To this end, we have participated in the Department's process for the allocation of Mental Health Services Act (MHSA) funds since its inception.

During our participation on the Systems Leadership Team, we have become aware that when MHSA Innovation (INN) programs were first approved three years ago, the funding was allocated to transitional age youth, adults and older adults. No funding was allocated to infants and children. It is, therefore, appropriate that during the process of approving the MHSA INN programs for the next funding period that the needs of our youngest population and their parents are addressed. We support the MHSA Innovation Project Proposal submitted by the Department of Children and Families (DCFS) and the Perinatal Task Force, respectively, and request that this year's consideration for the MHSA grants of \$15 million include the identification and treatment of families suffering from perinatal and postpartum issues. We know that this is an area of interest to your department and DCFS.

An article in the Sunday, June 29, 2014 edition of the New York Times titled, "The Trauma of Parenthood" by Professor Eli J. Finkel, Professor of Psychology at

Northwestern University<sup>1</sup>, summarizes the urgency of this problem. Professor Finkel states that:

“According to a 2010 article in the Journal of the American Medical Association, among new parents — three to six months postpartum — 42 percent of mothers and 26 percent of fathers exhibit signs of clinical depression.”

The article goes on to say, “The fact that postpartum depression rates are much higher among the poor than among the wealthy, who can purchase peace of mind through hired child care, supports the idea that the phenomenon is, in most cases, more circumstantial than biological.”

Families under the supervision of DCFS are generally very low-income individuals unable to reach the supportive services that are more accessible to families with higher income. New parents suffering from depression often leads to the neglect of their children. Neglect is the most frequently identified cause for children to be detained under the supervision of the child welfare system. There are the unusual but highly publicized cases of infanticide associated with severe depression that have raised the public’s awareness of the general problem of postpartum depression.

We thank you for your concerns and efforts in this field and appreciate your willingness to consider this request. We think the time is right to vigorously pursue an integrated plan to meet these challenges for the well-being of children and their families.

Sincerely,

Genevra Berger, Chair  
Los Angeles County  
Commission for Children and Families

GB:SDI:vn

c: Director, Department of Children and Family Services  
Board of Supervisors Children’s Deputies  
Board of Supervisors Health Deputies

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<sup>1</sup> Finkel, Eli J. “The Trauma of Parenthood.” New York Times 29 June 2014, New York ed.: SR12. Print.